
Security Cooperation with the Pacific

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The IARP division of the Air Force International Affairs Secretariat (SAF/IA) represents the Air Force's security assistance oversight for US Pacific Command's (PACOM) area of responsibility (AOR). This AOR covers over 50 percent of the earth's surface, 60 percent of its population, and 34 percent of the global economy. It comprises a wide diversity of cultures, political systems, and military challenges. The world's largest democracy (India), three of the world's remaining communist regimes (China, Vietnam, and North Korea), and the nation with the world's largest Muslim population (Indonesia), all fall within the purview of the Pacific division. Militarily, the threat of North Korea remains as the most destabilizing influence, but the dramatic rise of China's military capabilities, India's increasing regional role, and the less visible, but often dramatic, Global War on Terrorism in key countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia exemplify the wide array of challenges in the region.

To meet these challenges, SAF/IARP works within areas of overlap in which U.S. national interests are coincident with those of the host nation. SAF/IARP seeks to expand this overlap by promoting mutual understanding and goodwill between the USAF and host nation air forces. IARP, in coordination with other SAF/IA divisions, determines the scope and nature of training programs, foreign military sales (FMS) programs, cooperative armaments development, personnel exchange programs, and high level visits between USAF senior officials and host nation leadership.

IARP's role has transformed in recent years, from managing and administering FMS programs, to cultivating and maintaining politico-military affairs expertise for the countries with which it interacts. The goal is to deepen cooperation, interoperability, and understanding over a broad range of security issues. Originally, efforts toward meeting these goals concentrated on working with in-country security assistance offices (SAOs) to respond to FMS requests. Increasingly, however, activities are now geared toward addressing mutually beneficial programs that will lead to greater regional stability, including US and coalition capability to respond to contingencies and crises in the region. Two examples serve to highlight IARP's efforts in the Pacific region: India's pursuit of a new multi-role combat aircraft (MRCA), and an overarching effort to develop an integrated C4ISR network in the Pacific.

India relied heavily upon Soviet-made weapons and technical support until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1991 Gulf War. Relations between the U.S. and India improved throughout the 1990s but suffered a setback upon India's test detonation of a nuclear weapon in 1998. The Clinton administration promptly imposed sanctions prohibiting military interaction and limiting political relations. The aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, however, sparked a renewed American interest in South Asia and subsequently forced both the US and India to reconsider their strategic relationship. High-level contacts have resulted in codified agreements such as the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership and a ten-year defense agreement between the two countries. Equally important have been the growing organizational and military ties between the U.S. and India.

USAF relations with the Indian Air Force (IAF) have progressed apace with U.S. policy as indicated by the highly publicized and successful Exercise Cope India 2004. The USAF returned for Cope India 2005 in November. Currently, the IAF is seeking up to 126 fighter aircraft through its MRCA program. Both the F-16 and the F/A-18 have been identified as potential candidates. USAF has supported India's requests for information on the F-16, for which SAF/IA is planning to send a

delegation to India in the fall to brief the IAF. A significant purchase of a USAF-operated fighter by India would form the basis for a vibrant and enduring relationship between the two air forces. It would promote interoperability through shared weapon systems and cooperation through follow-on training requirements and exercise participation. Mutual understanding would be further enhanced by professional military education (PME), cultural exchanges, and senior level interaction between air forces. While there are still hurdles on both sides, India continues to consider non-U.S. Aircraft in their search for an MRCA. The potential for future cooperation between the two countries reflects a burgeoning relationship that was, until recently, inconceivable.

The idea of a shared Command, Control, Communications, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) infrastructure in the Pacific further reflects the proactive stance of IARP in security cooperation matters. The proven versatility and value of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in prosecuting the Global War on Terrorism has sparked marked interest by US allies and partners in the Pacific region. The sheer scale of the geographic expanse, the importance of sea lines of communication (e.g., a quarter of all world trade passes through the Straits of Malacca), the instability induced by terrorist and criminal organizations, and the unpredictability of North Korea regarding proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) have forced the U.S. and partner nations to reevaluate the need to have offshore surveillance capability.

Given the vast size of the Pacific, it is currently not possible to have broad ISR coverage over all areas of interest. Additionally, there is no adequate maritime sensor package for UAV platforms that will likely become the mainstay of U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM's) ISR capability in the near future. While other nations may not have the tremendous coverage requirement that PACOM does, they still often have surveillance requirements needs that extend well beyond their territorial waters. Japan, for example, receives 80 percent of its oil through the Straits of Malacca. In the future, SAF/IA envisions a networked C4ISR system among the U.S. Pacific partners that would allow real-time sharing of intelligence through the interoperability of UAV sensors and other collection methods (e.g., shared early warning radar, satellite imagery, etc.). This capability would serve to protect vital areas from the threats of terrorism, piracy, smuggling, WMD proliferation, and potentially, even ballistic missiles. It is conceivable, for example, that in the future PACOM might receive real-time data from a high altitude long endurance (HALE) UAV and subsequently alert a Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) partner to intercept a shipment of WMD-related materials bound for a terrorist organization. The post September 11, 2001 necessity for sharing information has broken down many of the information barriers that previously had led even close allies to withhold vital information from one another. Japan and Australia are soon expected to make decisions regarding a UAV program, and other countries in the region are also considering acquiring UAVs. UAVs fall under the purview of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), and each case must be handled on its own merits, but the potential for a synchronized and linked regional C4ISR network would be invaluable in promoting regional stability.

While India's fighter needs and the C4ISR in the Pacific are just two of SAF/IARP's activities, the division continually strives to expand security cooperation in the region. SAF/IARP played the USAF's lead role in the recent purchase of F-15Ks by Korea and is presently serving as a focal point in Singapore's Next Fighter Replacement Program, Thailand's consideration to both upgrade and purchase additional F-16s, and Japan's emerging F-X fighter replacement program. SAF/IARP also has worked closely with Malaysia's first major purchase of a USAF weapon (AIM-120 air-to-air missiles) in twelve years.

Many expert commentators have speculated that the 21st century will be the "Pacific Century," for not only does the region harbor great potential for progress, but it is also ripe for conflict. Future considerations for security cooperation will undoubtedly include such issues as the tensions in Korea, acrimony between China and Taiwan, China's further integration into the global economy and polity, Indonesia's emergence as a strong Muslim nation, and the continuing delicacy of relations between India and Pakistan. All these situations have possible global economic and security ramifications.

SAF/IARP realizes these ramifications and it is committed to supporting US policy through active and expanding engagement with the nations of the Pacific.

About the Authors

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